

# Helwaser Gallery

## Helwaser Gallery

833 Madison Avenue, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, New York, NY 10021

Phone: +1 (646) 476 7760 | E-mail: info@HelwaserGallery.com

www.HelwaserGallery.com

D'Souza, Aruna. "Richard Fleischner at Danese." *Art in America*, July 1999, pp.

looking down on a pentagon of bodies pulling alcoholic hits from a bottle. The impish central figure has his tongue extended and eyes closed in apparent distaste for this means of obtaining a high. Under the Kent Poster on the Subway plays off the starched, tennis-playing suburbanites pictured in a cigarette poster and a young gang member in the foreground. He pouts in sullen contrast to the ad's gleaming smiles. With this fellow, smoking even in the '50s, was an act of defiance.

A former Joker, Benjie, contributes written commentary to convince us how disenfranchised these otherwise innocuous-looking young men and women actually were. Benjie assures us that their troubled childhoods ultimately led to suicide, addiction and social dysfunction. These notes add a touch of authenticity to the exhibition. Unfortunately, the need for such interpretive text demonstrates the limitations of Davidson's photographs.

—William V. Gasis

### Richard Barnes at Henry Urbach Architecture

For his first solo show in New York, the photojournalist Richard Barnes showed six photographs of a cabin and other property belonging to Ted Kaczynski, better known as the Unabomber. Five of these, originally published in the *New York Times Magazine*, depict the cabin set up in a federal warehouse in California, where it is still being held as evidence. Another pictures the woodland clearing in Montana where the structure stood before the FBI removed it for Kaczynski's bombing trial.

Barnes is known for his stark but lushly evocative photo-documentation of archeological excavations, and he brings a similar aestheticism to this project. In four black-and-white shots, titled Exhibits A-D, the cabin appears against a black ground, as if floating in space. To create these images, which were taken with a large-format camera, Barnes used a backdrop and floorcloth and chemically manipulated the background. Shown from all four sides, the structure seems a model of pioneer utilitarianism: a simple hut, made from two-by-fours. In a fifth photograph, this

one in color, the cabin is seen in an empty warehouse at a slight diagonal to the camera; because the space has white walls and is well lit, the result looks remarkably like an installation in a down-at-the-heels white cube.

The common reaction to these photos has been to say that the hut, as decontextualized by the photographer's savvy presentation, neatly emblemizes the banality of evil. Certainly, Barnes's execution is esthetically flawless. The show itself also seemed a smart inaugural choice for this new gallery, which will focus on the relationship between art and architecture. Yet the self-conscious artiness of the presentation, on the part of both photographer and gallery, struck me as somewhat sickening.

In every shot one can see traces of still-living human drama. The cabin itself has been drilled and patched, courtesy of the FBI. And the final color photograph, depicting Kaczynski's empty homestead, is especially distressing. Here a chain-link fence, erected by the FBI, encloses the original building site; inside it lie some pathetic scraps of trash—presumably Kaczynski's possessions—and an overturned plastic lawn chair. Regarding this, it's impossible not to think of the messy human aspects of the situation—the many lives Kaczynski ruined and the sad fact of his brother being the one to turn him in. To be asked to appreciate such images in esthetic terms, as this show begged us to do, seemed horribly dubious. It also neatly emblemized the moral vacuum that makes so many "civilians" feel queasy about contemporary art, as well as contemporary journalism.

—Carol Kino

### Richard Fleischner at Danese

The ancient symbol of the labyrinth has long been privileged in the work of Richard Fleischner, a fact made clear in this exhibition, which included models, photographs and plans of environmental works from the mid-1970s, along with more recent forays (mostly from the 1990s) into the gallery-bound mediums of painting, photography and sculpture. An early work such as *Sod Maze* (1974), in which a field of tall grass was



Richard Fleischner: *Matera IV*, 1996, sepia-toned fiber silver print, 19 1/2 by 29 1/2 inches; at Danese.

mowed to create a circular maze, was evidence of the moment when the Minimalist logic of the earthwork incorporated an interest in archaic form. The more recent work all but abandons the large-scale project in favor of more intimate experiments.

Fleischner's series of sepia-toned photographs (all 1996) of the medieval Italian town Matera depicts a sort of readymade labyrinth of winding streets and eccentric, seemingly unplanned configurations. While most of the images show the curiously unpeopled city from a position outside its encircling walls, *Matera IV* places us within the maze, where its overall logic eludes us. The urban ensemble—as much sculpture as city—consists of a crossroads within a narrow alley, with tall walls framing the view. It is a point of many possible moves: we could go up the stairs, around the corner, into the niches and doorways.

Fleischner re-creates the labyrinthine effect in another piece, *Modular Block Construction* (1986-88), a sculpture made of

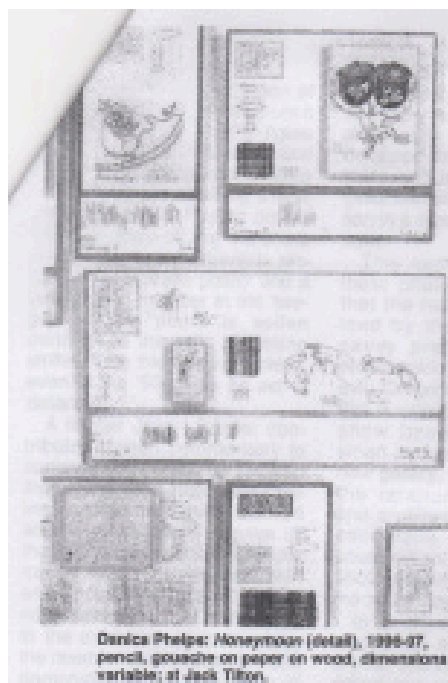
three identically sized blocks of mahogany arranged in post-and-lintel fashion and faced with oxidized copper sheeting. The work echoes *Matera IV*'s quality of not disclosing what lies around the corner at the crossroads. The copper facing is irregularly dimpled on some of the sides of the blocks, so that as you move around the piece a different unanticipated view is presented. This revelation of the sculptor over time works in defiance of the modular form of its constituent blocks.

The sense of time that is captured by the sepia tones of the photographs and the weathered walls of the city that they depict as well as by the archaic quality of the sculpture's distressed copper facing, is also reiterated in a series of untitled gouaches (1987-88). The compositions are heavily layered, with white often being the topmost color, to suggest a wall that has been whitewashed many times over. Into this dry, crumbly surface are etched gridlike forms, similar to graffiti on a Roman wall. The grid, one of the most favored configurations of modernism

Miranda Lichtenstein: *Untitled*, 1987-88, C-print, 29 by 24 inches; at Stefany Martz. (Review on p. 26.)



Art in America, July 1999  
p. 95-96



Danica Phelps: *Honeymoon* (detail), 1996-97, pencil, gouache on paper on wood, dimensions variable; at Jack Tilton.

signaling pure presence, even instantaneity, here is returned to an ancient past.

—Auna D'Souza

### Miranda Lichtenstein at Steffany Martz

Miranda Lichtenstein's New York debut exhibition, "Danbury Road," proffered nocturnal visions of rural Connecticut through nine lurid C-prints from 1997-98. All the images are high-contrast studies that are grounded in modernist formalism in their sense of compositional balance and spatial reductiveness. The colors are otherworldly, evoking infrared photography, digital manipulation or Fauvist vision. Due to the ambient light sources used by the photographer, primary colors dominate. Exacerbated by enlargement, the graininess of the film suggests a humid atmosphere that works well with the nighttime settings.

The roadside foliage of *Untitled* (#35) is bathed by red brake lights that make even the greenest leaves elicit a sense of emergency. The red lights seem to be those of a police car or a paramedic van piercing the country roadway's darkness; this locale could be Pollock's Fireplace Road or the scene of Warhol's *Saturday Disaster*. Rectangles of diffused house-

window lights loom in the distance, while a chemical blue sky mixes with the red leaves. *Untitled* (#36) shows a modest house replete with Neo-Classical articulations. In a setting otherwise enveloped in night, the building's walls, pediments and porches are revealed within cones of light emanating from garden spotlights. As if in a suburban variant of Albert Speer's "light architecture" of the 1930s, this exterior illumination makes the structure seem strangely dematerialized.

Lichtenstein's images attain an uncanny power by reminding us that photographic vision is not human vision. Another source of the uncanny is the compositional isolation of the houses that frequently appear in her works. Surrounded by thickets and darkness, these dwellings seem terribly vulnerable to surveillance or to voyeurs. Think *Rear Window* in the backwoods. —William V. Ganis

### Danica Phelps at Jack Tilton

Since graduating from art school a few years ago, Danica Phelps has addressed a topic that is of enormous importance to many young artists: money, especially the difficult getting and easy spending of it, and the anxious business of making one's creative way while encumbered by day jobs and whopping rents. *Fields* (1996), a horizontal row of diminutive gouaches and watercolors, seems like a set of rather lovely minimalist grids until you decipher exactly what's going on. Each piece consists of two interlaced colors, green and red, with the green representing Phelps's earnings and the red her expenses. The paper they're painted on is recycled U.S. currency, which adds a neat conceptual twist: works about money painted on the raw stuff of money.

Most of the works in this show feature drawings, scrawled notations and handmade charts and graphs, and in all of them Phelps attempts to fit the details of her own life into economically derived systems. *Honeymoon*

(1996-97) is a sprawling, wall-covering work that consists of dozens of drawings (once again on recycled currency) attached to variously sized wood panels. The disarmingly casual drawings follow Phelps and her husband on their honeymoon voyage, which included stops in England, France, Italy, Egypt and India. She focuses not on important sites and events but on small details: a bar of soap, a laundromat, a taxi in Cairo, a telephone call. What each costs is duly noted. At first you suspect Phelps must be nuts, out there in the enticing world and fixating on expenses. Still, there is something richly poetic in the way these drawings suggest myriad scenes, encounters and states of mind while sticking to a matter-of-fact objectivity.

On the vertical panels of *Block Island* (1997), we read about the ways Phelps earned money one summer (selling photos, waitressing) and how she spent it. *Brooklyn* (1998) finds Phelps in the artists' neighborhood of Williamsburg. Painted "week-at-a-glance" panels chronicle the days of her life and even provide maps of her daily route. Throughout this obsessive quest for order, you notice the vicissitudes of personal existence—welcome extravagances (lobster!) and potential calamities (studio disaster). Painted grids at the bottom of each panel chart, in greens and reds, the ups and downs of the artist's economic activity: red increases glimmeringly when rent is due, while green days seem downright beneficent. Scruffy yet exacting, Phelps's works are both weird and compelling. —Gregory Volk

### Nader at The Project

A cavernous new gallery on West 126th Street in resurgent Harlem, The Project recently presented a body of work by Nader, a 34-year-old Iranian-born, Berlin-based painter. Melding the influences of Dada, Surrealism and geometric abstraction into a contemporary style, Nader, who goes by only one name, paints human-machine hybrids and pieces of imaginary architecture against

skewed grids and flat fields of color. A good example of his architectural mode is to be found in *All of Wittgenstein's Children* (1998), a roughly 7-foot-square painting of a monolithic building rising against a gloomy black or gray background. (The show also included an earlier 7-inch-square version of the painting.) Lack of doors or windows, this imposing wedgelike structure is topped by double-paned skylight. Nonfunctional and theatrical, it looks like the invention of some architect whose designs are destined never to get built.

*Sarah Bernhardt as Hamlet* (1998) is a large (about 7½-by-10½-foot) diptych that portrays against a beige and chartreuse background, a robotlike creature made of odds and ends from junk heap: the torso is a gray black cylinder, the spindly limbs are pieced together from metallic armatures, the head is what looks to be a 1930s desk lamp. Although this protagonist seems at first to have little relation to the turn-of-the-century French actress named in the title, the stagelike setting and the numerous prostheses evoke the end of Bernhardt's career, when she continued to appear on stage despite having had one leg amputated.

Two more strange hybrid appear in *Meeting Between French Structuralism and German Existentialism* (1997), a 10-by-7-foot canvas executed with the most expressionist brushwork in the show. Here, a water tower with octopuslike tentacles seems to be in polemical battle with a pair of dismembered, black-boote human legs that are standing on stilts. The octopoid water tower dwarfs the legs, which are steadied by a chair back and a bodiless white glove.

Nader: *Sarah Bernhardt as Hamlet*, 1998, oil and acrylic on canvas, 7½ by 10½ feet; at The Project.

